

Message Text

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TO USDEL SECRETARY IMMEDIATE

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FOR EAGLEBURGER FROM AHERNE

E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS:OVIP (KISSINGER, HENRY A.)

SUBJECT: MILNE ARTICLE ON BACKFIRE BOMBER

1. FOLLOWING IS TEXT UPI STORY BY JOHN MILNE DATELINED
WASHINGTON 9/15. BEGIN TEXT:

2. THE WHITE HOUSE DENIES AS AN "OUTRAGEOUS LIE" A PUBLISHED
REPORT THAT SECRETARY OF STATE HENRY A. KISSINGER ORDERED
THE CIA TO DISTORT RESEARCH RESULTS ON THE RANGE OF THE
SOVIET UNION'S NEW BACKFIRE BOMBER.

3. THE REPORT WAS PUBLISHED IN THIS WEEK'S AVIATION WEEK
AND SPACE TECHNOLOGY, AN INDUSTRY MAGAZINE WITH MANY
SOURCES IN THE MILITARY AND INTELLIGENCE COMMUNITIES.

4. LAST WEEK, THE MAGAZINE QUOTED AN UNNAMED SENIOR
DEFENSE OFFICIAL AS SAYING: "WE ARE LOSING GROUND EVERY
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DAY TO THE SOVIETS IN STRATEGIC SUPERIORITY AND ALL THEY

HAVE TO DO IS STONEWALL IT AND WAIT FOR US TO MAKE CONCESSIONS. KISSINGER IS OUT TO DO EVERYTHING HE CAN TO GET THE TREATY AND THAT MEANS SECRET CONCESSIONS TO THE RUSSIANS."

5. THE NEW ISSUE SAID: "KISSINGER DIRECTED THE CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY TO SLANT U.S. ESTIMATES OF THE...BACK-FIRE BOMBER'S RANGE CAPABILITY, WHITE HOUSE OFFICIALS ARE CHARGING. KISSINGER ORDERED THAT THE RANGE ESTIMATE BE REDUCED TO COINCIDE WITH THE PRESENT U.S. POSITION IN THE STRATEGIC ARMS NEGOTIATIONS."

6. IN REPLY, THE WHITE HOUSE SAID: "THIS IS A SLANDEROUS ATTACK ON THE INTEGRITY OF THE SECRETARY OF STATE AND THE CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY. TO ALLEGE THAT THE STUDY WAS DISTORTED TO FIT POLICY PREFERENCES IS AN OUTRAGEOUS LIE. THE STORY IS TOTALLY WITHOUT FOUNDATION AND AVIATION WEEK HAS AN OBLIGATION TO SET THE RECORD STRAIGHT."

7. ADMINISTRATION SOURCES SAID MCDONNELL DOUGLAS CORPORATION, A MAJOR AIRPLANE MANUFACTURER, WAS GIVEN INTELLIGENCE DATA AND ASKED TO DETERMINE THE BACKFIRE'S PERFORMANCE CHARACTERISTICS. WHITE HOUSE OFFICIALS SAID THE CIA ORIGINALLY ORDERED THE STUDY AND WHEN KISSINGER "BECAME AWARE THAT THE STUDY WAS UNDERWAY...DATA WAS SUPPLIED."

8. ONE BIG QUESTION MARK IS THE PLANE'S RANGE. THE USUALLY RELIABLE JANE'S ALL THE WORLD'S AIRCRAFT SAYS BACKFIRE WAS ORIGINALLY DESIGNED WITH A RANGE OF BETWEEN 5,000 AND 6,000 MILES BUT "THERE IS REASON TO BELIEVE THAT BACKFIRE FELL SHORT TO ABOUT 3,570 MILES.

9. THAT RANGE WOULD MAKE BACKFIRE AN INTERMEDIATE BOMBER LIKE THE U.S. AIR FORCE 3,000-MILE F-111, UNLIMITED UNDER SALT.

10. AVIATION WEEK SAID THE PENTAGON ASKED MCDONNELL DOUGLAS TO MAKE A SECOND STUDY BASED ON ITS DATA AND "PRELIMINARY RESULTS REVEALED THE BACKFIRE'S RANGE IS CLOSER TO THE ORIGINAL U.S. INTELLIGENCE ESTIMATE OF 6,000 UNCLASSIFIED

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NAUTICAL MILES, CLEARLY MARKING THE AIRCRAFT IN THE HEAVY BOMBER CATEGORY THAT WOULD BE COUNTED IN THE 2,400 STRATEGIC DELIVERY VEHICLE LIMIT."

11. PENTAGON SOURCES SAID MCDONNELL DOUGLAS IS CONDUCTING A SECOND BACKFIRE STUDY BUT KNOWLEDGEABLE SOURCES DENIED IT WAS A REBUTTAL TO KISSINGER.

12. ON THE BEST AVAILABLE INFORMATION, BACKFIRE'S RANGE
MAKES LITTLE DIFFERENCE. DEFENSE SECRETARY DONALD H.
RUMSFELD HAS TOLD CONGRESS THERE ARE SO FEW OF THE PLANES
THEY WOULD NOT CONSTITUTE A STRATEGIC THREAT FOR SOME
TIME, AND THE BOMBER'S MAIN MISSION IN ANY EVENT IS FOR
USE AGAINST SHIPS AT SEA AND LAND TARGETS IN EUROPE AND
CHINA IN CASE OF WAR. END TEXT. ROBINSON

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